

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method of treating a crude oil comprising:

a step of separating the crude oil by distillation in a distilling section into a distillate oil and a heavy oil content, said distillate oil including a vacuum gas oil content, a gas oil content, a kerosene content and a naphtha content;

a step of thermally cracking the heavy oil content obtained ~~substantially~~ directly from a bottom of the distilling section into a lightened thermally cracked product; and

a step of separating the lightened thermally cracked product by distillation in the distilling section,

wherein said step of separating the crude oil by distillation and said step of separating the lightened thermally cracked product by distillation are carried out at the same time in the distilling section including a vacuum distillation apparatus, and said distillate oil is collectively introduced into a hydrotreating section without separating into each content having prescribed boiling range and is collectively subjected to desulfurization, cracking and hydrogenation treatment.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein the distilling section in which said step of separating the crude oil by distillation and said step of separating the lightened thermally cracked product by distillation carried out at the same time further comprises a pre-separation apparatus and a main separation apparatus.

Claim 3 (previously presented): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein an amount of the heavy oil content separated in said distilling section and withdrawn from the bottom is within a range of 15 to 55 parts by weight relative to 100 parts by weight of said distillate oil from the distilling section.

Claim 4 (previously presented): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein the heavy oil content separated in said step of separating a crude oil by distillation, withdrawn from the bottom, and fed to the step of thermally cracking contains substantially neither gas oil content nor vacuum gas oil content.

Claim 5 (previously presented): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein no heavy oil content is contained in thermal cracking residue in said step of thermally cracking.

Claim 6 (canceled)